

# Ecological integrity goals prompt expansion of Canadian national park system

by Carrie Ellen Gauthier

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IN NOVEMBER 2002 THE CANADIAN GOVERNMENT announced plans to create 10 parks and 5 new marine conservation areas over the next five years. During this time Canada also plans to accelerate actions to improve the ecological integrity of its 39 existing national parks. The increase in parkland and efforts to improve ecological integrity will implement the action plan of the panel on Ecological Integrity of Canada's National Parks.

Canada's plan focuses on inventory and monitoring, science-based decision making, developing partnerships, education, and increasing public participation, and shares many of the same fundamental goals and approaches as the National Park Service's Natural Resource Challenge. Both action plans support parks as living laboratories and identify the need to provide funding to researchers, make research at parks more accessible, and enhance opportunities for science-based education in parks.

The NPS Associate Director of Natural Resource Stewardship and Science, Dr. Michael Soukup, gave the keynote address in November 2002 at a three-day ecological integrity forum launching Canada's action plan in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Soukup focused on the increased benefits that both park systems will share with the expansion of their inventory and monitoring, improvements in science-based decision making, and

implementation of better management practices to preserve natural resources. He stressed the value of gathering information about species distribution, abundance, and trends, and air and water quality for sound management, decision making, and resource problem characterization.

Both park systems face the same threats from ecological stresses, nonnative species, fire, high levels of visitor use, habitat loss and fragmentation, air and water pollution, encroachment of urban and industrial development, and climate change.

Canada's new park sites will be located in British Columbia's Gulf Islands, at Ukkusiksalik and Bathurst Island in Nunavut, in Labrador's Torngat and Mealy Mountains, in Manitoba's lowland forests, and on the East Arm of Great Slave Lake in the Northwest Territories. Canada will also add national marine conservation areas in ecologically unrepresented marine regions. Three sites have been identified: Gwaii Haanas of British Columbia's Queen Charlotte Islands, Western Lake Superior, and British Columbia's Southern Strait of Georgia. Sites for the remaining two marine conservation areas have not been announced. ■

[carrie\\_gauthier@nps.gov](mailto:carrie_gauthier@nps.gov)

Publication Production Specialist, Natural Resource Information Division, Washington, D.C.



Pender Island is part of a proposed national park in the Gulf of Georgia, British Columbia, about 10 miles north of the U.S. San Juan Island National Historical Park.



Adjacent to Hudson Bay in Nunavut, Canada's third and newest territory, Wager Bay is in the heart of the proposed Ukkusiksalik National Park and represents the central tundra natural region of Canada. The proposed park area is geographically diverse and encompasses habitats that support caribou, muskox, wolf, arctic hare, peregrine falcon, gyrfalcon, polar bear, beluga, and ringed and bearded seal.

PARKS CANADA (ALL)